



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release UPON RECEIPT

Increasing pollution of Virginia's rich oyster waters takes an annual toll of at least \$1,500,000 potential income to those concerned with this industry.

Conditions in the past have been serious, according to Charles E. Jackson, Assistant Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior. Today, he said, they are becoming even more critical.

Speaking by radio to the people of Virginia from Norfolk recently, on the growing pollution problem in relation to their fisheries, Jackson reviewed the situation since 1934, and urged the erection of modern and adequate facilities for sewage disposal.

"The facts in the case are so clear," said the Assistant Director, "and the need of remedial action is so urgent, that I am convinced that only a lack of full information has prevented the correction of this pollution situation in past years."

The present discharge of municipal wastes reaching the waters of Hampton Roads directly or through tributary waters has been estimated at more than 25 million gallons of untreated sewage daily.

"That figure, large as it is, will soon be greatly increased due to the tremendous growth of population that is taking place," Assistant Director Jackson said. This growth is directly related to military and naval activities connected with the national defense program.

Unofficial estimates indicate a 40 percent increase in the pollution load--all to be cared for by existing systems, and poured without treatment into the waters of Hampton Roads.

After a careful scientific survey of the waters of the Hampton Roads area in 1934, the United States Public Health Service told the people of Virginia what they might expect. These officials warned that unless proper disposal of sewage wastes was to be provided, the health of the community would be seriously menaced, real estate values would shrink, bathing beaches within the area would have to be condemned as unsafe, and the shellfish industry in Hampton Roads, and surrounding areas as well, would be completely destroyed.

The waters of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries are one of the most important shellfish-producing areas in the world, and the waters of Virginia account for about one-fifth of the entire Atlantic Coast production of oysters. At about the beginning of the present century, when the Hampton Roads area was at the peak of its oyster production, it furnished between 2-1/2 and 3 million bushels of oysters a year, or about a third of the state crop.

Since that time production has been greatly curtailed due to several causes, the most important of which is pollution. Approximately 40,000 acres of oyster bottoms in Hampton Roads alone have been withdrawn from production because the water has become unfit for shellfish culture.

The bulk of Virginia's crop comes from private grounds, where planters who have made large investments plant and harvest oysters much as any land farmer cultivates his crops. These private oyster companies give employment to a large number of fishermen. At the present time, about 2,700 fishermen are employed by private companies in the Hampton Roads section during the winter months. In addition, about 800 oystermen operate as individuals. Unfortunately, these growers

are unable to place their product on the market. The major part of their grounds has been closed because the surrounding municipalities have poured untreated wastes into the waters adjacent to the beds.

In its recently published report, the United States Public Health Service pointed out that because sewage pollution is gradually encroaching into Chesapeake Bay, a large portion of the 3,000 acres off Willoughby Spit and Ocean View has also been closed for the direct marketing of oysters. At present there seem to be no available grounds to take their place. The fact that planters have been unable to obtain suitable grounds in spite of strenuous efforts is interpreted to mean that almost all available oyster grounds have already been developed. This makes it apparent that the oyster industry is gradually being paralyzed by the encroachments of pollution and will be completely destroyed in this entire section unless the trouble is stopped at its source.

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